

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEVEL
OF SELF-CONCEPT AND DRINKING PATTERNS OF
BLACK YOUTH**

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The Relationship Between Level of Self-Concept
and Drinking Patterns of Black Youths

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-concept and drinking patterns of black youths. A review of the literature indicates there is a relationship between the level of self-concept and drinking patterns of youths. However, studies that relate specifically to black youths were limited, indicating a dire need for research in this area.

The conceptual framework was eclectic and influenced by Nobles, Rogers, and Fitts. Nobles conceptualizes that one's self-concept is a continual product of social interaction with others. Rogers believes one's image or self-concept influences the way one interacts and perceives the world around him/her. Fitts posits that the self-concept serves as an index of one's mental state.

The study was exploratory in nature, utilizing purposive or judgmental sampling. The independent variable was self-concept, the dependent variable was drinking patterns, and the control variables were age, sex, and socio-economic status. The sample comprised 121 black male and female youths ranging in ages from 12 to 17. There were 73 black males and 48 black females. The grade levels of the students were seven through twelve.

The three hypotheses tested were: 1) there will be no significant relationship between socio-economic status and patterns of drinking for black male and female youths; 2) there will be no significant relationship between the level of self-concept, frequency of use, and socio-economic status; and 3) there will be no significant difference in the relative contributions of age, sex, socio-economic status, and level of self-concept to patterns of drinking for black male and female youth.

The method of analysis used for testing hypothesis one was analysis of variance (ANOVA). Hypothesis two was tested through the use of analysis of variance (ANOVA). Hypothesis three was tested using multiple regression analysis. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine if the data analyzed were statistically significant.

The data indicated there was no significant relationship between the independent

variable (level of self-concept) and the dependent variable (patterns of drinking). Also, the relative contribution of age, sex, and socio-economic status and level of self-concept to patterns of drinking of black male and female youths was not significant.

Additional research studies are needed in order to further investigate the alcohol problem of black youths as it relates to social and psychological needs.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the level of self-concept and drinking patterns of black male and female youths. Research studies on the level of self-concept of black youths as related to drinking alcohol was limited, thereby indicating a dire need for such studies.

The conceptual framework was eclectic and influenced by Nobles, Rogers, and Fitts. Nobles (1973) conceptualizes that one's self-concept is a continual product of social interaction with others. Rogers (1961) believes one's image of self-concept influences the way one interacts and perceives the world around him/her. Fitts (1972) posits that the self-concept serves as an index of one's mental state.

In view of the fact that it appears self-concept is multidimensional as stated by Fitts (1965), there are indications that in order for black youths to have a total positive self-concept, all levels of one's self must be of total worth, or otherwise one will experience frustrations, thus leading to escape through drinking alcohol.

Alcohol abuse among black teenagers is rapidly increasing in the United States (Collins, 1981; Greer and Long, 1977; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1978). Since World War II (1942-1945), alcohol consumption among youths, including black youths, has increased steadily (Maddox, 1964; McCord, 1959; Noble, 1978; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1980). In fact, alcoholism increased to a level of seventy percent in 1965 and has not changed substantially (Harper, 1976; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1980; Rachal et al., 1980).

Overall, it is estimated there are 3.3 million problem drinkers among youths ranging in ages from 14 to 17 years, and many of them are black youths (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1980).

Despite indications that alcohol abuse is a significant problem among black youths, seldom has this subgroup been the focus of research studies designed to analyze the problem which includes an examination of values and culture (Smith, 1973; Dawkins, 1976; Noble, 1978; Harper, 1978).

Three major factors appear to have influenced the patterns of drinking alcohol among black youths and how they feel about themselves. These factors are slavery, racism, and poverty, and social and emotional problems accompanied by the adolescent growth period.

Historically, consumption of alcoholic beverages by young blacks has been a part of black life since the days of slavery, when slave owners gave alcohol as a reward for obedience and hard work (Larkins, 1965; Harper, 1976). Additionally, slave owners tried to eliminate rebellion among the slaves and to control them through doling out alcohol (Larkins, 1965; Harper, 1976). Similarly, in the 1960's, when most blacks, including black youths, were segregated from the mainstream of American life, they suffered many inequities. Thus, the increase in alcohol consumption was used as a medication for the relief of racism and poverty (Harper, 1977; Douglass, 1962; Larkins, 1972; Frazier, 1962). Both of these factors, racism and poverty, have influenced the drinking practices and attitudes of black adolescents which are related to self-concept (Smith, 1973).

Many researchers have concluded that the study of the adolescent period is of particular relevance in understanding drinking and non-drinking patterns in American society (Maddox and Borenski, 1964; Smith, 1973).

During this growth period many black youths experience social adjustment and emotional problems (Smith, 1973). Some emotional problems during this time include mood swings, lack of self-confidence and low self-concept. These behaviors make black youths prime targets for drinking alcohol (Smith, 1973; Cross, 1979). According to research, it is during this period that alcohol consumption begins. That is, it begins around junior high school and reaches maximum usage about the time of graduation from high school (Globetti, 1967; Cahalan and Cisin, 1968; Maddox and Williams, 1968; Rachal, 1974; Jessor and Shirley, 1975; Engs, 1977; Collins, 1980). Dawkins (1981) reports that in Washington, D.C. a majority of black youths take their first drink between the ages of 11 and 15 years. That is, 15% of black youths grades 6th to 8th drink alcoholic beverages and 58% of black youths drink in grades 9th to 11th. Typically, the black males rather than black females are the largest percentage of alcohol drinkers (Dawkins, 1981).

The study was exploratory in nature, utilizing purposive or judgmental sampling. The independent variable was self-concept, the dependent variable was drinking patterns, and the control variables were age, sex, and socio-economic status. The sample comprised 121 black male and female youths ranging in ages from 12 to 17. There were 73 black males and 48 black females. The grade levels of the students were seven through twelve. The instruments used in the study were the Alcohol Information Questionnaire-National Institute of Alcohol Abuse Survey (1975); the Research Triangle Institute Adolescent Drinking Behavior and Attitudes Questionnaire (1975); and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965).

The data for this study included the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. They were used to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The study generated tables of frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and correlation. As a result of this, analyses were moved from t-tests for two means through multiple regression, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The data used to test Alpha were set at .05. There were three hypotheses tested. They were as follows:

Hypothesis #1. There will be no significant relationship between the socio-economic status and patterns of drinking for black male and female youths. Hypothesis #1 was not rejected. There was no significant relationship between socio-economic status and patterns of drinking for black male and female youths. The method of analysis used for testing Hypothesis #1 was analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Hypothesis #2. There will be no significant relationship between the level of self-concept, socio-economic status, and frequency of use of alcohol. Hypothesis #2 was not rejected. The results indicated that self-concept, socio-economic status, and frequency of use were not significantly related. Hypothesis #2 was tested through the use of analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Hypothesis #3. There will be no significant difference in the relative contribution of age, sex, socio-economic status and level of self-concept to patterns of drinking of black male and female youths. Hypothesis #3 was not rejected. Hypothesis #3 was tested using multiple regression analysis. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine if the data analyzed were statistically significant.

In keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, further analyses were conducted by regrouping the youths into two groups using age as the basis for the grouping. Group one consisted of students' ages 12, 13, 14 (N=42), and group two consisted of students' ages 15, 16, 17 (N=79). That is, the younger children were placed in group one and the older children were placed in group two. The groups were then compared in terms of their responses to a selected number of items relating to reasons for drinking alcohol. All of the items selected proved significant. The items included in the analysis were:

1. I drink alcohol because I am angry.
2. If I don't drink alcohol I feel I am not a good person.
3. I drink alcohol because it makes me feel at ease with others.
4. I have more fun when I drink alcohol.
5. I drink alcohol because it helps me to cope.
6. I do not feel good about myself, therefore I have to drink alcohol.

The chi-square test was used to determine the association between the youths' responses to the selected items and drinking patterns. An example of the results is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1

"I Drink Alcohol Because I Am Angry"
by Drinking Patterns and Age Group

Patterns of Drinking	Age Range		Total
	12-14	15-17	
Never	78.6	39.7	53.3
Seldom	9.5	26.9	20.8
Frequently	11.9	32.1	25.0
Always	--	1.3	0.9
Total	100.0 (43)	100.0 (78)	100.0 (121)

Chi-square = 16.65, df = 3, $p > .01$

Table 2 depicts how the regrouped youths responded when asked "If I don't drink alcohol, I feel I am not a good person." A significant difference was obtained between the groups in terms of drinking patterns and responses to the statement, with group two being favored.

TABLE 2

"If I Don't Drink Alcohol, I Feel I Am Not a Good Person"
by Drinking Patterns and Age Group

Patterns of Drinking	Age Range		Total
	12-14	15-17	
Never	73.8	38.0	50.4
Seldom	14.3	20.3	18.2
Frequently	11.9	30.4	24.0
Always	--	11.3	7.4
Total	100.0 (43)	100.0 (78)	100.0 (121)

Chi-square = 16.21, df = 3, $p > .01$

In response to the question, "I drink alcohol because I am angry," a significant difference was obtained by chi-square (16.65) between the two groups, in which group two was favored (Table 1).

Implications for Further Research

Additional research is suggested as a result of the findings from this study and also from the review of literature. The need for additional research studies in the following areas might prove to be important:

1. Further investigation of the alcohol problem of black youths as it relates to social and psychological needs.
2. A national research study of black male and female youths so as to establish the extent of the problem (Dawkins, 1980).
3. Additional studies should focus on drinking patterns in order to predict prevention strategies for black youths. This is needed because findings from this study and others indicate that early drinking behavior predicts drinking

patterns which could represent the population of future black adult problem drinkers. Therefore, they should be an important target for effective treatment programs.

4. Replication of this study through the use of stratified random sampling with a larger sample population.

In order to help resolve the problem of alcoholism among black youths, the social work profession, along with other interested professionals, should benefit from the results of this study. Not only will the study add to the sparse research in the area, but it also helps to identify significant variables related to the problem. These types of research studies should lend legitimate information for legislators, administrators, mental health experts, and others for improving strategies for dealing with the problem.

Social Work Practice

The social work profession and other social service professionals might consider the findings of this study when planning and implementing social policies and programs for black youths with alcohol related problems.

The social work profession, along with the educational profession, should join hands in creating alcohol educational programs in order to give black youths knowledge of the effects of alcohol, not only to their health, but also to their psychological and sociological well-being.

The American society places a high premium on growth and development of youths. This should also apply to black youths. Therefore, social workers, social planners, and educators should consider confronting the problem of alcoholism among black youths.

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